

Sermon Series: “Avoiding Politically-correct Christianity”—Lord of Life Lutheran—3/4/2001

Title: “Spirituality vs. Christianity”

Text: Acts 17: 16-34

Introduction: **Illus.: Finding a fixed point**

Theme: In today’s spiritual culture which expects no truth as absolute, as believers in Jesus we must not demonstrate “WHAT” is the truth but rather “WHO” is the truth with our words and our actions

Knowing the difference between spirituality and Christianity

- **Paul confronted a society in Athens much like ours (PRINT ACTS 17: 16-18)**
 1. Biblical spirituality was not the predominate “world-view” (*idols everywhere. . .his spirit was grieved*)
 2. Open, public antagonism to the Christian message (*idle babbler/strange gods = Jesus and resurrection*)
 3. Many of the “believers” (*synagogue Jews and God-fearing Gentiles*) had blended into their society
- **Our present-day cultural world-view**—which we have to avoid adopting to be *politically correct*
 1. **Intellectual**—want truths to be verifiable, reasonable, applicable—but without the foundations truths to anchor it
 2. **Eclectic**—“*cut and paste*” life philosophy—adopt contradictory philosophical/theological views into their life when they *seem to fit and validate the way that they are or want to live*
 3. **Humanistic**—*man and his abilities, potentials, and achievements are celebrated*—human-centered view point
 - a. **ILLUS.: THE PAINLESS LIFE**
 - b. No place for sin, fallen nature, Savior, and forgiveness
 - c. Seeks spirituality to fill the niche of life issues such as: purpose, guiding force principles, after life which we haven’t figured out but we are confident that we will—more a philosophical debate than a believe
 4. **Materialistic**—*look to things to be the answer*
 - a. **ILLUS.: LB “Bond Magazine” article (March/April 2001, p. 8)**
 - b. Look to give of themselves to save their world and have a sense of being a “good person”
 - c. Look to leave a lasting legacy behind so that they are not forgotten
 - d. **ILLUS.: CREATING WHAT CAN DESTROY US**
- **The Christ-centered world view**
 1. **A God–Man** who loved us enough not to destroy us for our mess-ups but came up with a solution to them
 - a. This assumes that there is a problem (sin, its consequences in our world, death)
 - b. This assumes our inability to do something about our sin problem (total depravity)
 - c. This assumes that we have to take our focus off ourselves and put it on another (Jesus Christ)
 - d. This assumes that we have checked it out and found that there is not another way but Jesus is **THE WAY**
 2. **A Man–God** who, individually, lives with us, relates to our need, and takes our place to pay the debt we owe
 - a. Seeing this not as a hostile take-over but rather a life-ring
 - b. Seeing God not at-a-distance or a “*philosophical thought for the day*” but as a personal, real, living, caring God
 - c. Seeing that Jesus is not a filler for my life but becomes the transformer of my life and is my life
 - d. *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20*

Bringing Jesus, the TRUTH, to a world desperately looking for “a truth”

- **Engage the “spiritual” seeker (PRINT ACTS 17: 19-21)**
 1. In the “*market places*” of your life (vs. 17)
 2. In lively dialogue on *their turf* (vs. 19)
- **Defend the hope within you with “gentleness and respect” (PRINT ACTS 17: 22)**
 1. *“But dedicate your lives to Christ as Lord. Always be ready to defend your confidence in God when anyone asks you to explain it. However, make your defense with gentleness and respect.” 1 Peter 3:15*
- **Connect on common ground (PRINT ACTS 17: 23-29)**
 1. Paul knew that the UNKNOWN GOD was a hedged bet—didn’t deprecate it/them or compromise but defined it
 2. The key to our Postmodern cultured world of “*no absolutes*” is to tell them **WHO** the truth is rather than **WHAT**
- **Never be ashamed of your uniqueness (PRINT ACTS 17: 30-31)**
 1. The confidence of our belief is a verifiable death and resurrection in Jesus and sure and certain hope of his return
 2. *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 1 Thes. 4:14*
- **Expect a mixed review (PRINT ACTS 17: 32-34)**

Finding a Fixed Point

On day six of the ill-fated mission of Apollo 13, the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. If they failed, they might never return to Earth. To conserve power, they shut down the onboard computer that steered the craft. Yet the astronauts needed to conduct a thirty-nine-second burn of the main engines. How to steer? Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, they could steer the craft manually. That focal point turned out to be their destination--Earth. As shown in 1995's hit movie, *Apollo 13*, for thirty-nine agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on keeping the earth in view. By not losing sight of that reference point, the three astronauts avoided disaster. Scripture reminds us that to finish your life mission successfully, "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

The Painless Life

In the book *Gaily the Troubadour*, published in 1936, Arthur Guiterman wrote the following poem. Reading his observations, you wouldn't guess it was written over fifty years ago.

**First dentistry was painless; Then bicycles were chainless And carriages were horseless And many laws, enforceless.
Next, cookery was fireless, Telegraphy was wireless, Cigars were nicotineless And coffee, caffeineless. Soon oranges were seedless,
The putting green was weedless, The college boy hatless, The proper diet, fatless. Now motor roads are dustless,
The latest steel is rustless, Our tennis courts are sodless, Our new religions, godless.**

Creating What Can Destroy Us

In *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen retells a tale from ancient India: Four royal brothers decided each to master a special ability. Time went by, and the brothers met to reveal what they had learned. "I have mastered a science," said the first, "by which I can take but a bone of some creature and create the flesh that goes with it." "I," said the second, "know how to grow that creature's skin and hair if there is flesh on its bones." The third said, "I am able to create its limbs if I have the flesh, the skin, and the hair." "And I," concluded the fourth, "know how to give life to that creature if its form is complete." Thereupon the brothers went into the jungle to find a bone so they could demonstrate their specialties. As fate would have it, the bone they found was a lion's. One added flesh to the bone, the second grew hide and hair, the third completed it with matching limbs, and the fourth gave the lion life. Shaking its mane, the ferocious beast arose and jumped on his creators. He killed them all and vanished contentedly into the jungle. We too have the capacity to create what can devour us. Goals and dreams can consume us. Possessions and property can turn and destroy us--unless we first seek God's kingdom and righteousness, and allow him to breathe into what we make of life.

Acts 17:16-34

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols. ¹⁷So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. ¹⁸And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? ²⁰"For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

²²Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.

²³"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; ²⁶and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' ²⁹"Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

³⁰"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, ³¹because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

³²Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." ³³So Paul went out of their midst. ³⁴But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.